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ART EDUCATION

Cover

AND

ART PATRONAGE

IN THE

UNITED STATES

By S R KOEHLER

[Reprinted from THE PENN MONTHLY for May and June 1882]

PHILADELPHIA

Press of EDWARD STERN & CO

1882

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FAS Cont.

ART EDUCATION AND ART PATRONAGE IN THE UNITED STATES.

I.

SOME years ago, William Morris Hunt, the artist to whom we owe the mural paintings in the Capitol at Albany, was invited to lecture at Yale College. In reply to the invitation, he wrote a long letter, declining the honor, which he finally deemed it best to suppress, substituting therefor a short and formal note. The letter was, however, preserved, and Dr. Henry C. Angell gave it to the public in his "Records of W. M. Hunt," which appeared originally in the *Atlantic Monthly*, and were afterwards published in book form. From this letter the following extracts are taken:—

"One capable artist, with his assistants, employed as formerly, would produce more good workers than all the schools in the country, and with this difference: that works would be produced, instead of theories and advice and teachers. If good art is produced, take advantage of the fact, instead of inveigling hundreds into an occupation where not one in a thousand can make a living, unless he resort to talking, toadying, or speculation. . . . It seems to me high time that something should be done to encourage producers. The country is being overrun with art-teachers and lecturers, because we don't want doers, but talkers. When we really want art, there will be a call for artists to paint, and producers will be respected, employed and encouraged. The world seems to want machines to manufacture artists, poets, statesmen and philosophers; but when these exist, neither their work nor their opinion is wanted. One is invited cordially to join the gang, and produce what he is not to produce—works. . . . If Michael Angelo and Titian were living to-day, they would not be called upon to paint. They would be listened to by the wise, and told that the Greek only could produce art. Were they even to lecture from Maine to Georgia, artists would not necessarily rise up in their wake."

William Morris Hunt is responsible for many queer things, painted as well as spoken, but nothing will be found in all the writing on art that has of late years afflicted the country, showing

a better appreciation of the present artistic situation in the United States, and going more thoroughly to the very root of the question which it is the purpose of these papers to discuss, than the extracts just quoted. They contain the pithiest statement yet made of the strangely anomalous and dangerous condition into which art and artists have been forced in our country,—a statement which is all the more weighty, as coming from one who was himself an artist. It may be suggested, however, that it is simply the outcome of a mind embittered and diseased by unsatisfied ambition. But it needs only to be amplified, to convince all thoughtful persons that this is not so. To undertake this amplification will be my first and principal task.

We have heard a good deal, lately, of the great artistic development within these United States, and certainly the interest we have shown in matters of art has increased most marvellously. But it seems about time to stop in our career, and to examine what the development has led to. So far as I can see, the result may be summed up briefly thus :—An increase of schools, of artistic societies of all sorts, and of exhibitions ; and an enrichment of technical methods, which latter, however, is due mainly to influences from beyond the sea. “Only this and nothing more.” *

“The world seems to want machines to manufacture artists, poets, statesmen and philosophers ; but when these exist, neither their work nor their opinion is wanted. One is invited cordially to join the gang and produce what he is not to produce—works.” That is what Hunt said, and Hunt was right. It suits the present state of affairs among us, exactly.

As evidence, I submit the following facts :

From a statement which I have lately made up, I find that there are at least thirty special schools in the United States in which “art” is taught. One-half of these schools are devoted to the training of artists proper and teachers of art, and the number of pupils attending them amounts to over 2,400. The other half comprises the schools for designers, skilled artisans, etc., and the attendance in them is between 3,000 and 4,000. With this second division of the army of learners, however, we are not concerned. If the schools which these artisans attend make them, indeed, more

* I ignore the museums, which are the most promising results of our “development,” as they have only a secondary bearing upon the question under discussion.

skilled, and do not corrupt them into unskilled artists, we will vote them a blessing. Our business lies more immediately with the 2,400, the great majority of whom are women.

Vasari, in the introduction to the third part of his "Lives," exults over the fact that, owing to then modern improvements, it was possible for an artist in his day to produce six pictures in one year, whereas formerly it took six years to produce one picture. We can beat that, as everyone knows quite well from the auction sales of some of our artists, who turn out seventy-five to one hundred pictures yearly with the greatest ease, even if we must admit that these pictures are not great frescoes or altar-pieces. But in spite of this fruitfulness of our painters, we will accept the modest sixteenth century estimate, and will call six works per annum the producing capacity of each artist. Now, if we place the course of study in our schools at four years, which will give us an average of 600 pupils in each class, we shall have a yearly accession of 600 to the ranks of our artists, with a producing capacity of 3,600 works per annum. Furthermore, if, for argument's sake, we assume that there were no artists in the country when these young men and women began to study (which is manifestly untrue), and if we vouchsafe to each of them a life of only thirty years after they have left school (which is little enough, as artists are notoriously long-lived), we shall have, in thirty years from the time the first of the 2,400 entered school, 18,000 artists, with a producing capacity of 108,000 works per annum! And this upon the presumption that the number of pupils remains stationary, while one of the great arguments for our development is drawn from the fact that the attendance increases from year to year. I know well enough, of course, that not all of these students will reach the aim with which they entered upon their career. But we can discount the figures given to our heart's content, we can kill off as many of these unfortunates as we please, we may even say that fully one-half will never be producers, and still the number left will be simply appalling.

I argue, then, that we are producing altogether too many artists, and my argument is still further borne out by these figures:—

In the year 1881 there were exhibited in the leading exhibitions of the six leading cities of the United States, about 6,500 works of art. Nearly all these works were by American artists, and

nearly all of them were for sale ; and although some of them are here counted more than once, having travelled from city to city in quest of purchasers, it is easily seen that the number given is very far from covering the whole number of works produced during the year. For, as I have before stated, these figures are taken from the catalogues of the leading exhibitions, such as that of the National Academy of Design, in half a dozen of the leading cities only, leaving unaccounted for at least twenty other cities in which exhibitions were held and reported upon in the papers, and all the "special sales," "artists' sales," auction sales, and dealers' exhibitions held in the year 1881.

Another fact which speaks volumes is this, that, with all this machinery of exhibitions, auctions and dealers, our artists are still complaining of insufficient facilities for selling.

And this leads us to inquire into the success of our exhibitions. The large number of exhibitions and sales held during the year may be a sign of active demand, and of a healthy state of the market. The test will be found in the monetary returns.

At the last exhibition of works by living American artists, held at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, there were sold, out of 258 works, two small pictures, and the Museum itself expended a few hundred dollars on small sculptures. At the exhibition of the Boston Art Club, January, 1881, there were sold, out of 289 works by 181 artists, none. At the water-color exhibition of the same club, in the spring of 1881, there were sold, out of 475 works by 229 artists, 50, amounting to \$2,500. At the exhibition of the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association, Boston, fall of 1881, there were sold, out of 462 works (not including etchings, etc.,) by 278 artists, four canvasses, amounting to \$650.

Things are not, however, as bad everywhere as they are in Boston. The two most successful exhibitions of 1881 were those of the American Water-Color Society, and the National Academy of Design, both of New York.

At the former, the sales amounted to \$32,000. But the catalogue showed 803 exhibits by 266 artists, so that, had the proceeds been divided pro rata, each artist would have received \$121.* At the National Academy, with 438 exhibitors and 752 exhibits,

* The figures at the Water-Color Exhibition of 1882 were nearly the same: Number of exhibitors, 243; sales, \$31,000; pro rata, \$128.

the sales were reported at \$42,838 for 120 works, which, divided among the exhibitors, would have given each artist \$96. And it must, furthermore, be borne in mind that the prices reported—in these cases as in all other cases,—are “catalogue prices;” that is to say, asking prices which in very many instances are far from representing the actual selling prices.

Again, the total amount realized in the year 1881, in ten of the leading exhibitions of which reports were attainable, was \$114,104,—always at “catalogue prices.” In these same exhibitions there were shown 4,955 works, which we will reduce to 3,500, to eliminate wood-cuts, etchings, and works counted more than once. But even so, if the proceeds, *as reported*, had been divided per canvas, each would have brought its author less than \$33, out of which sum would have had to be paid the frame, and, in some instances, the carriage to and from the exhibitions. (To this it may be added that every one of the so-called “artists’ sales” of the year 1881, that is to say, the auction sales arranged by the artists themselves, of which I have seen reports, were failures.)

How many hopes must have been blasted, how many mouths must even have gone unfed, if these exhibitors were all dependent upon these exhibitions! And sadder still to think of is the fate of those who were turned away. At the National Academy alone, quite as many works as found a place on the walls were absolutely refused! * Nevertheless, the results of the year 1881 are lauded as extremely satisfactory, the Academy exhibition having been, I believe, the most successful in point of sales ever held. It is within the memory of all interested in such matters, that there were hardly any sales at the Academy exhibitions. Some years ago, a regular saleswoman was engaged, and she did better. But the comparatively brilliant results of the late exhibitions are mainly due to the efficiency of the gentleman who at present manages the sales. That his is the triumph, may be gathered from the fact that his advent in the Philadelphia exhibitions has been followed by similar results,—a fact which reminds me of the apparently paradoxical, but in reality severely logical, saying of a friend, that in a

* At the Water-Color Exhibition of 1882, the proportion was still more unfavorable, as, out of about 1,600 works offered, about 1,000 were refused. This, as the reader will remember, led to the Exhibition of Rejected Water-Colors.

certain city of the United States, which shall remain nameless, no pictures are *bought*; they are all *sold*!

Art is "an occupation," said William M. Hunt, "where not one in a thousand can make a living, unless he resort to talking, toadying, or speculation." That is precisely the meaning of my friend's paradox.

In the face of these facts it behooves us, for the sake of humanity, as well as for the sake of art, to pause, and give serious consideration to our present system of art education and art patronage.

"If good art is produced," said Mr. Hunt, "take advantage of the fact, instead of inveigling hundreds into an occupation where not one in a thousand can make a living." In other words: "Do not induce more and more young men and women to apply themselves to art, so long as you have not work enough to do even for the good artists already among you."

Webster defines the verb *inveigle* as follows: "To persuade to something evil by deceptive arts or flattery; to entice; to seduce; to wheedle." It is a hard word to use in the light of this definition; yet I fear that Mr. Hunt was justified in using it.

But, before I proceed, I must beg of my readers most earnestly that they will not misunderstand what follows, as I hope that they have not misunderstood what went before. Whatever I may say against our prevailing system of art education does not stamp me an enemy of art schools on general principles. As we are now situated, art schools are a necessity, and the question is only as to their quality. Furthermore, I wish it to be distinctly understood that I am the last man likely to say anything against drawing in our public schools, from the primary classes up to the highest institutions embraced in our system, so long as it gives itself for what it really is and must be: that training of eye and hand, and that imparting of a knowledge of form which every one ought to have. Such teaching of drawing, however, is not "art education." As well might we call writing and grammar "poetical education."

Having thus defined my position, I can now endeavor to answer the question which will naturally arise in the reader's mind: How do we "inveigle" young people into the occupation of which Mr. Hunt has drawn such a doleful picture?

The answer is simple enough. By lowering the standard of art education; by easing the way of the student beyond all warrant;

and by holding out rewards which, while they may serve to heighten the self-esteem of the pupil, are utterly worthless, either intellectually or materially.

It is not to be gainsaid that most of our art-schools are of a very elementary character. That, however, is not a crime, so long as they are acknowledged to be elementary, and are thorough as far they go. Speaking of the school of drawing and painting at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Professor Ware, its late secretary, says: "The school is distinctly elementary, and as such is not to be compared with such institutions as the Art Students' League in New York, the organization of which is specially adapted to students in a considerable state of advancement." No danger can arise from an institution whose limitations are so clearly understood, and so openly expressed. Nor is anything to be feared from a school like that of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. The admirable results it has shown are amply explained by the great importance attached in it to the study of anatomy, and by the last paragraph of its circular, which states that "the Academy does not undertake to furnish detailed instruction, but rather facilities for study, supplemented by the occasional criticism of the teachers." Plainly, this is not "a machine to manufacture artists." <The danger arises from those schools which, by high-sounding titles and flattering prospectuses, hold out the vain hope of leading their pupils to the very pinnacles of art, and then, perhaps, cap the climax by sending those whom they have misled forth into the world with a certificate or diploma> I shall not endeavor to analyze the motives which animate these institutions. Whatever the motive, the result is the same. Take, for instance, the institution which bears the noble title of "The Massachusetts Normal Art School." No objection could be urged against it, if it were simply called, as it ought to be, a "Seminary for Teachers of Elementary and Industrial Drawing." But when we see the crude still-lives, and the weakly heads which are a regularly recurring feature of its exhibitions, and when in their presence we recollect that one of the certificates of this school entitles the holder to teach in *art* schools, our hearts sink within us.

Let us be just, however, in our attempts to fasten the blame where it belongs. <Much of the lack of profundity which we may complain of in some of our art schools is chargeable to a general

lack of profundity throughout the nation. Our tendency toward haste leads us to seek elevated railroads in all departments of life, and often induces us to take empty glitter for the reality. I think I am right in saying that the whole of the high-sounding terminology at present in vogue in the State of Massachusetts, from the "State Director of Art Education" downwards, is a concession made to the public, whose interests could not be aroused by the solid benefits of simple "instruction in drawing," but who eagerly caught at the gaudy bauble of "art education."

"Some there are," says Cennino Cennini, in his "*Libro dell'Arte*," written early in the fifteenth century, "who follow art from poverty and the necessity of life, and hence for profit, and also from love of art. But above all are to be praised those who strive after art from love, and from nobility of mind only. You, then, who are lovers of this beautiful striving from nobility of mind, come to art above all others, and clothe yourselves in advance with this garment: namely with love, fear, obedience, and perseverance. And place thyself under the guidance of a master as early as possible, and part from the master as late as thou canst." In Cennino's 104th chapter occurs the well-known passage in which he speaks of thirteen years as the period necessary for study, to which he adds the admonition "to draw continually, and not to stop, either on holidays or working days. And thus," he continues, "is the gift of nature changed to solid skill by great practice."

Possibly some of my readers may object to Cennino as a mere handicraft's man, and not an artist. To these I would recommend the following from Leone Battista Alberti's "*Tract on Painting*," where it occurs in the second book: "Whosoever practises painting, let him learn this art from the very foundation. Those who desire to gain glory in painting, let them have this one great care: to reach that fame and name which were reached by the ancients. And it will be well here to remember that greed has ever been the enemy of worth. A mind bent only on gain will scarcely be able to acquire fame. I have seen many who have failed of gaining either riches or fame, because at a time which ought to have been devoted to study, they were already running after gain; these certainly would have reached fame, and riches and pleasure as well, if they had continued to increase their talent by study."

Art teaching in those days was not done in schools at all. A boy

was apprenticed to a master as in any other trade, and he had to learn all the mysteries of the trade through untold drudgery from the very beginning. It is unnecessary to adduce examples with the story of the lives of Raphael and Dürer present to our minds. (The advantages of this workshop instruction were two-fold: it accustomed the pupils to hard work, prevented their merely playing at artist, and was sure to crush the love of art out of them unless it was genuine and deep-seated; and it left them with something to do at the end of their apprenticeship, for the good masters were always in need of good journeymen.)

From the time of Michel Angelo, whose short and fitful career as a learner is quite in accordance with his self-willed character, "workshop instruction" was displaced by "academies," "apprentices" became "students," and "master-painters" and "master-sculptors" were finally transformed into "cavalieri," "commendatori" and "professori"—in spite of all which fine titles the decline of art continued uninterruptedly.

(It goes without saying that workshop instruction is no longer feasible, that much of what was then taught would now be useless, and that schools and academies are a necessity. But if we compare with this by-gone method of instruction the four-year courses of our schools, and if we consider that even so careful a school as that of the Museum at Boston exacts of its pupils, as obligatory, only "three hours [of attendance] a day, for four days in a week," we shall no longer be surprised to find that but few of our artists have that thorough training, that wonderful skill of hand, which we are apt to look upon as the special privilege of the old masters, and the lack of which, in our own land, is so often deplored as a lack of artistic temperament. The secret, however, lay in this, that these men *clothed themselves in the garment of love, fear, obedience, and*,—above all else—PERSEVERANCE!

(A still greater evil, however, than the low grade of our schools is the undeniable tendency towards the multiplication of these incompetent institutions. Every city, every village almost, wants to have its "art school," when it ought to be satisfied with an ordinary drawing class. If we desire "to do something" for art, we straightway open a new art school, or, in the words of Hunt, we cordially invite a new lot of young people to join the great gang of those who are asked to produce works which they had

better not produce, because nobody wants them. And to fill our classes and swell the list of pupils, we make the terms as easy and the course of study as pleasant as possible, and we give prizes and medals and honorable mentions, and possibly certificates or diplomas. And with these and a completed course of instruction, but nevertheless with a totally inadequate education, these students are sent forth into the world to begin the battle of life.

Now, what are these young men and women to do? Having "graduated" from "art schools," and having been led to look upon themselves as "artists," the most natural thing for them to do is to paint pictures or model reliefs, or what not. And pictures they paint, or reliefs they model. And having painted their pictures or modelled their reliefs, they turn to you or to me, and say: "My dear madam," or "My dear sir, won't you buy my works?" But you shrug your shoulders, and I shrug my shoulders, and Tom, Dick and Harry shrug their shoulders, and the critics make fun of the pictures and reliefs, if they deem them worthy of notice at all, and the result is that they remain unsold.

"Have we not done enough for you by paying for part of your education? What more can you expect of us?"

And once more the question recurs: What are these young men and women to do? If they were wise enough to laugh at the world's indifference, and energetic enough to do downright hard work, they would throw away their brushes and modelling-sticks and begin a new career,—difficult enough, no doubt, but not as difficult, at least, as that in which, to quote my text again, "not one in a thousand can make a living without talking" and sundry other unpleasant operations. Few, however, take this course; some because—looking upon themselves as slighted geniuses, Raphaels and Michel Angelos in disguise,—they will not; the great majority, probably, because they cannot. And so there is nothing left for them but to turn round and *teach*; that is to say, to inveigle others into the ranks of Mr. Hunt's hopeless gang,—a calling which their certificate of proficiency, mayhap, expressly authorizes them to exercise. Our cities abound with so-called artists who undertake to teach what they do not themselves know, and whose lives must often be embittered, if by nothing else, by the knowledge of their own incompetence. And as each incompetent teaches several others, everyone of whom is in turn compelled to do the

same thing, it is quite evident that the curse must spread in ever-widening circles.

< That this sad result is the outcome of well-meant effort, of charity, of enthusiasm, cannot be doubted. We are admired by all the world for the large sums we expend upon benevolent and educational institutions, and French writers especially are astounded at the art schools cropping up all over the country, and all of them, with one exception, the result of private effort and munificence. > Some people have even gone so far as to envy us these possessions, and to deplore that, besides the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* and one or two provincial institutions, there are no art schools in France. Would to heaven that we had one great, thorough, yet broad, national school of art, with a Louvre and a Luxembourg alongside of it, the one to teach us the lessons of the past, the other to cheer and honor the workers of to-day!

Looking all these facts squarely into the face, I have come to the conclusion—at which some of my readers may possibly be shocked—that what we need at the present moment is the *discouragement* rather than the *encouragement* of art study.

I repeat, distinctly and deliberately, *discouragement*. *Discouragement*, that is to say, (by raising the standard and tightening the discipline of our art schools,) to those who would take up art from necessity or indolence only, as an easy and genteel occupation, and who, having no calling, can have no hope; but the best of *encouragement* to those who are willing to work faithfully and resolutely, and who come clothed in the garb of "love, fear, obedience and perseverance." < We need not fear that by following such a course we shall incur the danger of stifling some genius. Genius cannot be stifled, and will work its way up in spite of all obstacles. Furthermore, there is nothing to prevent us from being continually on the lookout for genius, and to lend it a helping hand as soon as it shows its head above the crust.

As means of such encouragement, I would suggest the endowment of one, or at best a few, of the schools of the country in a manner which would enable them to develop into normal institutions of their kind, instead of frittering away our means in the erection of numberless buildings and the purchase of numberless sets of casts and other appurtenances; the promotion to these higher schools of only the talented pupils of the lower schools, coupled with

scholarships for those who need them; and the establishment of travelling purses, with the obligation attached to them to send home ~~each year~~ a certain number of works executed during the year. Half a dozen such *bourses de voyage* would outweigh all the prizes, medals, mentions, certificates and diplomas given throughout the whole country.

II.

In the first half of this paper, I have endeavored to give a clear statement of the evils which at present afflict us, and to point out the remedy, so far as art education is concerned. But education must be supplemented by patronage,—if I may be permitted to use so hateful a word, for want of a better. If, then, we suppose for a moment that we have stopped rearing artists indiscriminately, wantonly, blindly,—indeed, I am tempted to say, *criminally*,—as we are now doing, we are confronted by the question: “What shall we do with the artists we already have, and more especially with those we shall rear in future?” “If good art is produced,” says Mr. Hunt, “take advantage of the fact;” and he adds: “It seems to me high time that something should be done to encourage producers.” But, if our good art is to be seen in our exhibitions, it is evident, from the statistics presented, that we do not take any very great advantage of it, and that we must use other means to encourage producers. Possibly we may learn a lesson from history as to what these means ought to be.

In all its greatest periods, art has been national and monumental; those of its works which have left the deepest impress upon the mind of mankind were wrought for the council-chambers and temples of the world, not for the cabinet. The question is whether such a cultivation of the arts is possible with us. Various reasons have been assigned, tending to negative this question. Political and religious Puritans have said that a high state of the arts is a sign of decay,—of the enjoyment of luxury, rather than of the energy of acquisition; that the arts are the servants of lordly and priestly power, and a source of peril to a republic. In our own case, moreover, it has been claimed that we, being a mercantile and manufacturing people, are by nature and circumstances incapable of artistic aspirations. Lastly, the theory has been advanced, that, owing to the change in

intellectual conditions, the era of art lies forever behind us.

If art were really a poisonous flower, if it were the spontaneous product of the moral morass of the imperial Rome of antiquity, of the equally if not more iniquitous papal Rome of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, we, as true lovers of liberty, might, it might be said, hail the comparative feebleness of our art as a manifestation of health. Fortunately, however, the truth is to be found on the other side. In antiquity, the arts grew up in the healthy atmosphere of (comparatively) democratic States of Greece,—notably in the most democratic of them all, in Athens,—and thence were transplanted, after they had reached the limits of the development then possible, to the monarchical courts, and finally to Rome, where they led the sickly, although apparently exuberant, life of hot-house plants. Precisely the same spectacle we see repeated in the Italy of the Renaissance. That Rome was not the home of the arts; that Roman art was but an offshoot of the great Florentine tree, is a universally recognized fact. Art followed its natural course of development in Italy only so long as the city republics of the country—however incomplete as republics they may have been,—retained their independence. And I wish to lay special emphasis upon the fact, and to bring it out in the strongest possible light I can throw upon it, that these republics, which were the principal centres of development in Italy at the time,—not for the arts only,—were distinctly commercial and industrial in their character, governed by the citizens through the representatives of the trades and guilds in which they were organized.*

At the head of them all stands Florence. As early as the year 1300, nearly everyone in Florence, we are told, could read. Even the mule-drivers sang the *canzoni* of Dante, and many of the finest

* A writer in the New York *Tribune* of March 19th, in reviewing Mr. Symonds's "Age of the Despots," makes that author say, in substance, "that freedom, the freedom of cities and peoples, and the liberty of the individual, did not tend to the advancement of literature and art" in Italy. This is a curious result to arrive at from a careful perusal of the book. At the very beginning, on page 6, Mr. Symonds says: "The reason why Italy took the lead in the Renaissance was that Italy possessed a language, a favorable climate, *political freedom, and commercial prosperity*, at a time when other nations were still semi-barbarous." The italics, of course, are mine. Mr. Symonds's whole book reads almost like a panegyric of Florence; she is called "the noblest of Italian cities" (page 56), and it is claimed for her that the primacy of her citizens "in literature, the fine arts, law, scholarship, philosophy and science was acknowledged throughout Italy" (page 183). It is true that Mr. Symonds dates the beginning of

manuscripts which have come down to us from that day are said to have been the property of Florentine artisans. And all this intellectual life, we are assured, rested upon a general solidity of character which resulted from the participation in affairs of state, from commerce and travelling, and, more than all, from the systematic exclusion of idleness from the city. The superiority of the Florentines was so well recognized at the time, that Pope Boniface VIII. called them a fifth element of the world. It is hardly necessary to recall the fact that the three great luminaries of early Italian literary history—Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio,—were Florentines. The rise of the movement known as the Renaissance, in literature as well as in art, is also traceable to industrial and mercantile Florence. The study of Greek is concentrated in and emanates from that city; and Boccaccio, the merchant's son, and himself trained as a merchant in early youth, claims the honor of having been the first Italian to obtain copies of the Homeric poems from Greece. Florentines, again, were those men who first made the study of antiquity and the collecting of ancient manuscripts their aim in life. Cosmo de' Medici (1389–1464,) is one of the pioneers in this movement, not only as an appreciator of antiquity and a collector of its remains, but also as the patron and active friend of less fortunate men engaged in similar pursuits. Niccolò Niccoli, a Florentine citizen who died as early as 1436, ruined himself by his love of antiquity; and it was for him that Poggio, another citizen of Florence, searched the Abbey of St. Gall for ancient manuscripts in 1415, while attending the Council of Constance. To the same circle also belonged Giannozzo Mannetti, who served his apprenticeship with a merchant, for some time kept the books of a banking-house, studied perspective in company with Paolo Uccelli, and

the enslavement of Florence from the elder Cosmo de' Medici; but he, nevertheless, speaks of the Florentines as "the sober-minded citizens of a still free city" (page 96,) as late as 1471. The commercial character of Florence is repeatedly dwelt upon. See, especially, the extract from Varchi's "*Storia Fiorentina*," given by Mr. Symonds in Appendix II., page 537.

The same spirit pervades Mr. Symonds's volume on "*The Fine Arts*." Having weighed the claim of the Medici to praise or blame, the author concludes his fifth chapter as follows (page 265): "Meanwhile, what was truly great and noble in Renaissance Italy found its proper home in Florence, where the spirit of freedom, if only as an idea, still ruled, where the populace was still capable of being stirred to super-sensual enthusiasm, and where the flame of the modern intellect burned with its purest, whitest lustre."

finally became one of the most celebrated speakers of his much-speaking time. That was the same time when Florentine fathers occasionally provided in their testaments for the fining of their sons by the State, should they neglect to carry on some trade or business. It was only after these citizens of Florence had shown the way, says Burckhardt,—good authority in these matters,—that princes and popes began seriously to concern themselves with humanistic studies. In the study of archæology, by means of the careful examination of ancient remains, the Florentines again took the lead. The year 1403 finds Brunelleschi and Donatello at Rome, measuring and drawing its artistic treasures under the greatest disadvantages, at a time when most of them were still buried in the earth and interested the Romans themselves only as materials for the lime-kiln. It has, therefore, been claimed for these two great artists that they were the founders of modern archæology. In the arts, it is quite superfluous to add, the Florence of the fifteenth century was as much the principal seat of supreme activity and development as it had been in the days of Giotto. Brunelleschi and Donatello have been honored with the title of “the two founders of the Renaissance;” but their aspirations and endeavors would have been in vain,—would probably never have been born,—had not their native city furnished the soil upon which they could grow. It provided the space and the freedom necessary for the expansion of the individual which is impossible in the surroundings of despotism; it offered, again in the words of Burckhardt, “the highest political consciousness, the greatest wealth of forms of development,” which made it worthy to be called “the first of the modern States of the world.”

If, now, from the Florence of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, we turn to the Rome of the same period, what do we find? While the busy, commercial city was at the height of its artistic glory, while Ghiberti was at work upon his celebrated gates, while Brunelleschi and Donatello, as we have already seen, were studying the antiquities of Rome, and the former was fitting himself to vault the dome of St. Mary of the Flower, the condition of the old mistress of the world “was [I quote Professor Norton,] wretched in the extreme. Nothing was left of the dignity of the ancient city but its ruins. There was no settled civic order, no regular administration of law or justice. Life and property were insecure. The

people were poor, suffering, and turbulent. Rome was the least civilized city of Italy."

And this artistic and intellectual supremacy of Florence, this leadership in all that is worth striving for, this proud position at the head of the advancing columns whose task it was to dispel the gloom of the Middle Ages and to rend the clouds that had gathered, so that the light of the sun of humanity might once more be shed upon an almost devastated world, is due, next to the natural capacities of the race, to that realistic, practical and mercantile turn of the Florentine mind which we may claim to be also our own heritage, and which is so often denounced by self-styled idealists as the enemy of all higher pursuits. I might call numerous witnesses to support my position; but limits of space demand that I should content myself with one. "The Florentine men of business," says Professor Norton, "had long since learned the importance, first, of choosing capable and trustworthy agents, and then of leaving them unimpeded in the discharge of the duties committed to them. The whole course of procedure in regard to the construction of the cupola [of St. Mary of the Flower, of which Professor Norton is speaking,] indicates the foresight and good judgment of the men who had it in charge. It is a fine exhibition of the high qualities of Florence at a period when her streets were alive with the varied activities of a flourishing commerce, when her people were still confident in their own powers, full of restless vivacity of mind, and when a group of such artists as the modern world had never seen were ennobling her with the products of the emulous rivalry of their genius."

Another fact which is of the highest importance in the light of a lesson to ourselves and which, therefore, we must not overlook, is this, that even for Florence the best time was when she was freest and most active, and when the Medici were still inscribed among the members of the guild of woollen weavers. With the decay of those branches of actual industry which had made her famous the world over,—the weaving of silks and woollens,—and with the undue increase and preponderance of banking, her decay began; and, when her bankers aspired to be princes the end was nigh. Happy, indeed, were the days of the early Renaissance! The most valiant deeds of Renaissance art, the various stages of its healthy development, were crowded into this period,—the cupola

of Brunelleschi, the gates of Ghiberti, the adornment of Or San Michele, the frescos of Masaccio, the writings of Leone Battista Alberti. And how did the Medici themselves, as well as the character of their art-patronage, suffer under the influence of the change from merchants to princes! There is hardly a more pleasant picture to call to mind than the garden of Lorenzo il Magnifico, with its collection of antiquities. Under the supervision of old Bertoldo, the pupil of Donatello, it became a sort of academy for the artists of the day. In this garden, Lorenzo mingled freely with the young men who studied there, and it was here that he said to the youthful Michael Angelo, after the occurrence with the faun's head: "Go, and tell thy father that I would like to speak to him." The result is well known; but it is well known, also, that these same Medici were the curse of Michael Angelo's life. Anton Springer, one of the latest biographers of Raphael and Michael Angelo, has conclusively shown that the artistic glory which courtly historians have heaped upon Pope Leo X., the son of Lorenzo, is in no wise merited. He has proven that Leo degraded art to the rank of a courtesan, and that, while he reduced Raphael to the position of a decorator, his only office in life, as towards Michael Angelo, seems to have been to thwart that artist's plans and prevent their execution. For Professor Springer's arguments, I must refer the reader to his book, much as I would like to spread them on the record in support of my own reasoning. A far more pleasant picture in the art-history of Rome is supplied by the relations of Raphael to Agostino Chigi. Next to Pope Julius II., it was he who enabled Raphael to show his powers at their best, in the frescos of Sta. Maria della Pace and the Farnesina. And how well Agostino Chigi cared for his name! Who would remember Chigi, the merchant and banker, simply for his wealth? Had not his ambition risen above the dust,—even though it were gold-dust,—he would now be numbered with that nameless crowd whom Dante encountered on the confines of hell,—

"Of whom nor infamy, nor good, was known,"—

and whose dull, uneventful lives doom them to eternal oblivion. But, as the friend and patron of Raphael, his name lives forever and rivals even that of the proud Medicis on the papal throne.

It would be an easy matter to show, by numerous examples, the baneful influence of princely patronage, even if we do not forget

the Visconti of Milan, or the rulers of Mantua and their relations to Mantegna. What advantage did Dürer derive from the patronage of the Emperor Maximilian, the last of the knights? An order for a nonsensical wood-cut, ten and a half by nine feet, and in payment illegal demands upon the city treasury of Nuremberg, which the council paid reluctantly in part, and in part refused altogether. He fared better with Jacob Heller, cloth-monger of Frankfurt, who, in spite, of an angry correspondence with the artist, paid the seventy florins demanded in advance of the price originally stipulated for the picture ordered, and expressed himself satisfied to boot. And, in the case of Holbein, the first picture which we think of when his name is mentioned is the "Meyer Madonna," executed for the money-changer of Basle. Next to this, his popular fame rests upon the "Dance of Death," which was designed to order for a book-seller of Lyons; and in England the only larger compositions for which he was commissioned were "The Triumph of Riches" and "The Triumph of Poverty," painted for the merchants of the Steel-Yard, while the king and his court had no better employment for his brush than the counterfeiting of their own amiable visages.

I have dwelt principally upon Florence in support of my argument; but I might cite, in addition, Siena, with its Duomo and the paintings in its public palace; Pisa, with its Campo Santo; Venice, that greatest and most lasting of the mercantile republics of Italy, which was the home of the second great school of Italian art; and I might, finally, ask the reader to remember, that, when art put on another garb and prepared to walk along new paths, it was in commercial Holland that it found a congenial home. Verily, in the light of history, we need have no fear that the commercial character of our republic might be a stumbling block to our art.

The remaining objection, that, owing to the change in intellectual conditions, the era of art lies forever behind us, seems at first sight to be more potent. Undoubtedly, in the present unsettled state of philosophical conviction or religious belief, with a mixed population of agnostics, atheists, Christians of all shades, orthodox and liberal Jews, watered with a vast mass of people who are totally indifferent to these matters, all of whom are entitled to respect and equal rights, a religious art, such as that of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, is not to be looked for. But is there nothing besides this, notably in our own case? Does not our State revolve

around the grand central idea of liberty, which has brought together here all the people of these States, and has united them by a bond more noble, even if it should not be more powerful, than that of blood? Is not the development of this idea traceable all through our history? And is not this history as picturesque, as full of color, as any other? I claim that it is. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that our art has as yet received but little inspiration from it. And this may well lead us to ponder over the question: "How is it that we, a people full of energy and activity, and therefore imaginative,—for imagination lies at the bottom of all activity,—free, successful and wealthy, of mixed blood,—which is conducive to health,—how is it that we have thus far shown so little true appreciation of art?" Even the great centennial era through which we have just passed has not given that impetus to art which might have been looked for; a few monuments, and that is all. Surely, our commercial character has not stood in the way. The phenomenon must, therefore, be traceable to other causes. I shall leave it to the psychologist, however, to discover what they are. Meanwhile, I shall endeavor to show, that, so far as opportunities and material go, no good reason can be assigned why our own mercantile republic should remain behind the old mercantile republics of Italy as regards art.

Professor Norton, in his book on "Church-Building in the Middle Ages," which I have before quoted, has drawn for us an admirable picture of the activity of Venice, Siena and Florence, as shown in the erection of the churches of St. Mark, Our Lady of the Assumption, and St. Mary of the Flower. The book, as I have read it, has seemed to me not so much a mere learned study in the history of art as a glowing delineation of the civic pride, tinged with religious fervor, which induced the entire people of these cities, without regard to faction, to concentrate their energies and to lavish their wealth upon these monuments. At the same time, it impressed me as a powerful although indirect protest against our own indifference in such matters. That this indifference does exist, that we have no civic pride, cannot be denied; but it is difficult to find a reason why it should not be otherwise. Undoubtedly, the building of churches as civic undertakings is a thing of the past. There are other undertakings, however, as worthy and

as noble,—more worthy, indeed, and more noble,—which only await our bidding to assume shape.

On the 28th of December, 1880, the city of Cambridge celebrated the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of its foundation. As I read the oration delivered upon this occasion by Colonel Higginson, the public palaces of the old Italian cities and the great town-halls of Flanders and Germany rose up before my eyes; and I pictured to myself the citizens of Cambridge, carried away by the enthusiasm of the centennial era, resolving to build a new town-hall which should be worthy of the celebrated university city and a monument to the elevated spirit of its people. And in the council-halls of the new building I saw at work a master, with a band of pupils, decorating their walls according to the programme laid down by the orator—unwittingly, no doubt,—in his picturesque historical sketch of the city. There was the semi-military exploring party on that cold winter day of 1630, in the primeval forest which then stood where now rise the halls of the university; the election beneath the oak tree on May 17th, 1637, in which Winthrop triumphed over Vane; there was the feast given to Goffe and Whalley, the “regicides,” by the magistrates, in 1660; the meeting of the freeholders, in 1774, in opposition to the so-called *mandamus* councillors; “the horrors of the midnight cry” preceding the battle of Lexington; the burial by torchlight of Hicks, Marcy and Richardson; and, lastly, Washington assuming command under the elm. These, and many other subjects from which an artist might readily choose, were suggested by Colonel Higginson’s vivid oratory. And then, in the pursuit of my fancies, I seemed to see other cities, stung into activity by a spirit of peaceful emulation, bent upon equalling and, if possible, outdoing Cambridge; and I saw the great city-halls rising up everywhere, as in the days of old, and a busy and happy crowd of architects, sculptors and painters at work upon them, celebrating the deeds of the forefathers—out of whose trials, and labors, and triumphs, have resulted our own happiness and the hope of the world,—as they had never been celebrated before.

Revised (I must beg my readers’ pardon for building such castles in the air, and they are quite at liberty to laugh at them as childish. My aim was to show that the opportunities, as well as the material, for great monumental undertakings are at hand, if only the desire

existed to utilize them. Indeed, the material is richer here more varied than anywhere else. The history of the discovery of the continent, the Puritan history of New England, the Knickerbocker history of New York, the history of the settlement of Maryland, the reminiscences of the War of Independence everywhere,—these and many other subjects will surely be the welcome themes of the artists, if not of our day, at least of the future. Possibly, however, we shall have yet a while to forego the hope of much national, State and municipal art patronage. But, even so much remains to be done. Not all of the art of the best days of Italy was directly inspired by the State. The artists were kept busy by orders emanating from corporations of all kinds, who took a pride in having their halls or the chapels dedicated or owned by them decorated by the best artists of their day; and in this they were largely followed by private persons. When our halls of exchange shall be decorated like the Cambio of Perugia, when the religiously inclined shall feel it necessary to sanctify their places of worship by the glories of art, when the walls of our concert-halls shall be covered with the creations of genius, and when art will thus be found everywhere, even in the crowded haunts of business,—then, and not until then, may we hope to see our dreams of a national art realized. Small beginnings are even now noticeable here and there; but a vast field, which might be cultivated to the greatest advantage, both of artists and the great body of the coming generations of American men and women, is still absolutely untouched. Our public-school buildings are becoming more spacious from year to year; but their halls, in which the pupils are gathered every morning and on every festive occasion, are suffered to remain in chilling nakedness. I know of only one,—the hall of the Girls' High School in Boston,—which has been decorated, and that with casts from the antique only, by the generosity of citizens of Boston. What a glorious field these halls would offer for the brush of the painter and the munificence of the man of wealth!

But the objection is urged that we have no artists capable of executing such works. I deny the validity of the objection; I stigmatize it as born of prejudice and blindness. From the days of Trumbull—whose great merits we are only beginning to realize,—down to our own day, we have wronged our artists by unjust indifference and distrust. If the mentioning of names were not out

of place here, it would be an easy matter to point out a number of artists whose past achievements would be a sufficient guarantee for the satisfactory execution of any task that we might be likely to confide to them. But, if we allow the objection to stand for argument's sake, we are confronted by the question: "How shall we get these artists? Shall we not go into the water before we have learned to swim?" In that case, it is absolutely certain that we shall never get into the water and shall never learn to swim. Italy did not stand by until she had a Raphael to decorate her walls. Generations of men worked before him, and frequently one generation destroyed the work of its predecessors to make room for what was conceived to be better. (That is the inexorable law of progress; if there had been nothing to destroy, there would have been nothing better to put in its place.)

"One capable artist, with his assistants employed as formerly, would produce more good workers than all the schools of the country." When Mr. Hunt wrote this, he had in view a condition of things such as we have just been picturing to ourselves. And, by adding: "When we really want art, there will be a call for artists to paint, and producers will be respected, employed and encouraged," he showed that he was alive, also, to another advantage which such a condition of things would bring with it.

Modern artists are manufacturers of pictures,—I pray that they may pardon the expression,—which they paint on speculation and for which they must seek a market. (See my text.) But the artists themselves are not responsible for this anomalous position. It is we, the public, who force them into it, because we are not able to supply the ideas upon which they might base their works. Not so in the ages, the arts of which are, by common consent, called "great." It was the ideal of the entire Greek race that inspired the Greek artist, a world that lived in each Greek breast and brain, and which the sculptor or painter had only to make visible to the eye to delight his countrymen. In the gradual accomplishment of this realization, Greek art ran its course, ever and ever repeating itself, ever and ever refining upon itself. Had Phidias been compelled to invent his subjects, had he been forced to rack his brain forever for new means to tickle the sluggish fancy and open the reluctant purses of his fellows, had every new Zeus, or Athene, or Aphrodite, been greeted with a yawn, and the remark: "O, we've

seen this before! Can't you give us something new?" very likely that we should have any Greek art to sigh over and to inspire the remark which Mr. Hunt puts into the mouth of our wise men, "that the Greek only could produce art which cannot too often be iterated that the artist must not, cannot, be the original creator in the sense of the invention of subjects. It is a great office, as sublime as any that may be entrusted to man, the realization, the clothing with form and life, of the ideals of our fellow-men, and, consequently,—provided the artist does not disdainfully apart from his fellows,—the realization of his ideal.

I know that there are artists, real as well as so-called, whose opinions will curl at the opinions here expressed. Let them sit at the foot of history, as we have sat there. Let them read, for instance, the story of Luca Signorelli's great frescos in the Duomo at Orvieto. It is delightful reading, and most instructive,—how Luca was called before the representatives of the "little council;" how they voted to employ him with fifteen black beans "yes" and three white beans "no" (the very reverse, by the way, of our own custom); how he was bound to execute the histories according to the directions of the *camerlengho*; how he was enjoined not to paint less figures on the walls than were shown in his drawings, although he might paint more if he wished to; and more to the same effect. Degrading, is it not? (And yet which is better,—to have a whole city eagerly watching your progress, to know that you are the exponent of the highest aspirations of the best of your fellow-men, to be in demand at half a dozen places at the same time, or,—to paint on speculation, try this, that, and the other subject, send to all the exhibitions about the country, and await the result in anxiety?) It does not seem difficult to choose. But I repeat that the artist cannot create the conditions which will present such an alternative. "*When we really want art, there will be a call for artists to paint.*" It is evident that this want must come from the public, and that we shall not *call upon* our artists to paint unless we have ideas which we long to see realized. Until that time arrives, things will have to go on as now, and pictures will be *sold*, not *bought*.

I sum up my argument. (We have more artists already than we care to employ; yet we continue to multiply insufficiently equipped schools, which turn out ill-trained graduates, doomed to

misery. Humanity demands, therefore, that we should try to reduce the number of students, teach those well who remain, and find work for them when we have taught them. This can only be done by the creation of a national, truly American school of art, not limited to painting pictures for parlor ornaments, (although these are by no means to be excluded,) but called upon, also, to exhibit its powers in the execution of monumental tasks. That such a school cannot be created artificially, is self-evident. I have shown, however, that the opportunities and the material for such a school are ready. The only question, therefore, that remains to be answered, is this: "Are we, as a people, capable and desirous of developing such a school?" It is for the future to answer this question; but I live in the faith that the reply will be in the affirmative. And I believe, also, that this art of our future will be more glorious than anything that has gone before.

When the city of Florence breathed again more freely, in the years that followed the expulsion of Piero de' Medici and the death of Savonarola, the revival of her spirit showed itself also in a renewal of artistic activity, and it was resolved to decorate the council-hall in the palace of her Gonfaloniere. For one of these proposed decorations, Michael Angelo drew his great cartoon. And what did it represent? An episode from the wars against Pisa, the old commercial rival of Florence, whom she hated unto death and had set herself to subjugate. Covetousness, envy, pride, injustice, all the worst passions of the human heart, dictated the choice of the subject. Thus did she, at the end of her own career, erect a monument to that most fatal departure from a true commercial policy which was one of the causes of her ruin. Fortunately, there are no such blemishes to be found as yet in our own history; and let us hope that there never will be. We may, indeed, claim; however numerous our imperfections, that we have jealously kept the jewel which has been entrusted to us, and that we have even been mindful to increase its brightness. How much purer, nobler, grander, will, therefore, be those works of art which we have seen arise in our vision,—which will not be born of superstition and fear, of pride and hatred, but of love, truth, and good will to all men, and which will be monuments, not of tyranny and oppression, but of liberty, justice and humanity.

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